

## **Award for Excellence in the Teaching of Geography Dr Michael J. Fox**

Although this is the second Mike Fox to win the Award for Excellence in Teaching Geography, and the second instructor from Mount Allison University to win the award, Michael J. Fox is second to none when it comes to teaching geography.

His long list of accomplishments got started when he became hooked on geography while completing his undergraduate degree at Western Ontario. This was followed by his Master's at the same university, and then he did something completely different from most on a promising academic path: he obtained a teaching degree. He taught high school geography for six years, and it was then that he realized he had indeed found his true academic love. His successes in the high school environment prompted him to seek a new challenge and complete his Ph.D. at McGill in geographic education.



During Mike's subsequent stellar career at three universities, it became clear that he was an equally fantastic teacher and administrator. He held the administrative titles of Dean of Students, VP of Student Affairs, VP Academic and Research, and Acting President. Luckily for hundreds of students, he never let his administrative duties get in the way of what he felt was most important: teaching geography. To define teaching by Mike's standards means one usually carries the highest teaching load in a department, and one must make sure that no student fails to be reached and inspired.

The Geography and Environment Department at Mount Allison has gained a reputation for pedagogical innovation, one almost entirely owing to the efforts of Mike Fox. Although he is the most senior member of our department, a position that frequently leads some to slowly fade away, he is also easily the most innovative and dedicated. Examples include taking time out of his busy schedule to obtain his high school teaching license in New Brunswick, so he can volunteer his time teaching upper-level high school students university geography. Many of the students that are first caught up in his infectious passion for geography in these high school classes move up into the hallowed halls of our universities, carrying with them their first university credits—credits in introductory geography. Those that end up at Mount Allison have no problem finding their old friend, and many often go on to major or minor in geography.

His innovations do not stop on the edge of a campus or a high school. His abilities as an educator, regional planner, and innovator merged in his successful efforts to have the Tantramar Region added to the eight existing North American UNESCO Regional Centers of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development. To do so, he brought together university, high school, and provincial education departments, and then further included the regional planning district, the town and village councils, and especially the local First Nations. He then managed to wrap the whole group of stakeholders into a cohesive unit focused on the single purpose of educational sustainability, and then had his efforts sanctioned by the provincial department of the environment. He based the entire operation out of his Department—with the central focus being the extensive involvement of geography students.

For efforts such as these, his students follow him in droves. Since Mike left his heavier administrative role and took on a very full teaching load at Mount Allison, our Departmental registrations have doubled on a campus with an enrolment cap. The increases have been greatest in Mike's courses, and specifically his introductory courses. These have become so popular that he has not taught a course without a substantial waitlist in the past four years. He often opens these courses up, moving the original caps from 96, to 160, or even to 200. Estimates are that in most years, a quarter of the entire student population of Mount Allison University has taken a course with Mike. He is so popular with students that three years ago the student government representatives developed a new campus-wide teaching award, The Golden Apple. Their first recipient was Michael J. Fox.

Mike strongly believes that all university faculty should provide service to their community and to their university, but that they should place first and foremost their most significant duty, the one that can ultimately engender the most positive change: teaching. Thousands of students, colleagues, and community members are eternally grateful that Michael J. Fox practices what he preaches.